

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Thursday, March 12, 2009.

**CONTACT:**

Carolynn Bright  
Media Relations Coordinator  
(406) 495-7506

**SAF Accepting Applications for Free Foster Youth College Prep Camp**

(HELENA) In an effort to help more Montana foster youths realize their dreams of attaining postsecondary education, nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation (SAF) will host its fourth annual “A Step Ahead” College Prep Camp this summer in Billings.

The free, three-day camp — sponsored in cooperation with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services — is scheduled to take place July 7-9 on the campus at Montana State University –Billings. The deadline for applications is April 25 and participation is limited to 24 campers.

“Statistics show that 70 percent of foster youths across the nation want to attend college, but less than 10 percent of them achieve that goal,” said Rhonda Safford, camp coordinator. “By fully immersing the campers in the campus environment, they can become familiar with those surroundings. That way, going to college for real won’t be as intimidating.”

According to Safford, 60 percent of foster care youths who attend “A Step Ahead” successfully make the transition to college — significantly higher than the national average.

While at the camp, the foster youths receive classroom instruction in areas including basic computer skills, debt management techniques, and how to use the Montana Career Information System (MCIS) to research scholarships, colleges, careers and more.

In addition, they are provided detailed information regarding the purpose of Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) and how to properly complete the application. Foster care youths are eligible to receive up to \$5,000 a year to pay for their college expenses through the ETV program.

Finally, each camp participant receives a new, laptop computer to take with them at the end of the camp — a tool camp coordinators believe is important to the foster youths’ success in higher education.

“The camp is a great experience. You meet new people. You can learn what college is all about without just being thrown into it,” said 17-year-old Bianca Lincoln, a 2008 camp participant.

To qualify, applicants must be in state or tribal foster care custody, or recently “aged out” of the foster care system. In addition, they must have identified aspirations to attain postsecondary education as part of their Transitional Living Plan.

To apply online, go to [www.SmartAboutCollege.org](http://www.SmartAboutCollege.org), click on “Get to College,” select “Foster Youth Summer Camp” and download the application packet. Or, call Rhonda Safford at (406) 495-7750 to request a paper application.

*Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to finance and pursue their postsecondary education. Funds generated by SAF are returned to Montanans in the form of education grants and public benefit programs - to date more than \$14.7 million. For more information, visit [www.safmt.org](http://www.safmt.org) or [www.SmartAboutCollege.org](http://www.SmartAboutCollege.org).*